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**CERTIFIED PUBLIC MANAGER PROJECT**  
**USING THE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE AS A METHOD TO IMPROVE**  
**INVESTIGATIONS**

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**Resubmitted 9/13/02**

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## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

In January 1999, the South Carolina Human Affairs Commission implemented a survey questionnaire program, which was derived from the agency's Strategic Plan and its preceding Baldrige Self-Assessment.<sup>1</sup> The survey questionnaire is a tool that is used in the Compliance Programs Division to obtain feedback from Complainants (individuals who file complaints) and Respondents (individual (s) whom the complaint is filed against) regarding their experience with the agency's investigative process and their assessments of that process. The survey questionnaire was developed to help improve customer service. The Commission does not use the survey questionnaire as a performance-measuring tool for investigators because it's too subjective.

It is the hypothesis of this project that the information from the completed and returned questionnaires can be used and acted on to improve the Commission's investigative process. It is further hypothesized that improvements in the investigative process attributable to the information have occurred and can be identified, and that the survey questionnaire program will provide opportunities for further improvement in the investigative process.

There are five individuals who are involved in the process/analysis of the survey questionnaire. The Executive Assistant who oversees Compliance Programs and his

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<sup>1</sup> South Carolina Human Affairs Commission, Strategic Plan, (January, 1999)

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Administrative Assistant and three Division Directors who are divided into three different categories. The Private Sector Investigations Division process employment discrimination complaints filed against private, non-governmental employers in Carolina with 15 or more employees. A Division Director and four investigators are currently assigned to this Division. The Public Sector Investigations Division process employment discrimination complaints filed against agencies of state government, city government, county government and regional government. A Division Director and five investigators are currently assigned to this Division. The Age/Disability Investigations Division processes complaints alleging employment discrimination on the basis of age and disability in the public sector and in the private sector employers with 15 or more employees. A Division director and four investigators are currently assigned to this Division.

### **PROBLEM ANALYSIS/DATA COLLECTION**

When the Compliance Program Unit first started using the survey questionnaire, investigators were responsible for mailing the survey questionnaire to the Complainant and the Respondent. During the first year, the survey questionnaire was sent to all of the Complainants and to all of the Respondents. When the survey questionnaires were returned to the Compliance Program Unit, they were distributed to the Executive Assistant, the investigator's supervisor and the investigator in charge. Later on, management made a decision to have the Administrative Assistant to be responsible for mailing the survey questionnaires. This was done because it was found that some investigators were not consistently mailing the survey questionnaire to the Complainant

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and the Respondent. Subsequently, a training consultant with the Office of Human Resources (OHR) recommended that the survey questionnaire form be changed so that a numerical value would be placed on the form in order to make the survey questionnaire more measurable. Beginning the second year and continuing since, the survey questionnaire is sent to all of the Complainants and every fifth or tenth Respondent. This change in sending the survey questionnaire to every fifth or tenth Respondent is due to the fact that management found that the same Respondent is addressing the same comments on the survey questionnaire. Also, some of the Respondents are people whom the Commission deals with on a regular basis and some of the responses were repetitious (of the Commission being outstanding). At the present time, no survey questionnaires are being mailed due to the current budget cuts. Once the agency's fiscal posture improves; the Commission will resume the process.

The Administrative Assistant does a quarterly report on the percentage of returned and completed survey questionnaires. The rate of return from Complainants is 25% and 75% from the Respondents.

The Executive Assistant reviews the survey questionnaire and maintains them in a file. He keeps a record of the comments received from the Complainants and the Respondents for each individual investigator. The Executive Assistant looks for a pattern of the same comments from the Complainant and the Respondent, as well as the same comment being made about the same investigator (for example, if there is a pattern of comments that an investigator is being rude to the Complainant or the Respondent).

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The Division Directors also maintain a file of the survey questionnaires for each investigator.

The analysis of data regarding the surveys shows that out of the 1218 employment cases investigated by the Commission, the Complainants submitted 184 evaluations and the Respondents submitted 493 evaluations that described how in their respective views the investigators handled their cases. The survey questionnaire for the Complainants consist of four statements that indicate the extent to which the Complainants agree or disagree with statements regarding the service received during the investigation. The number (1) indicates strongly disagree; the number (2) indicates disagree; the number (3) indicates agree; the number (4) indicates strongly agree and the number (5) indicates not applicable.

The following presents the questions in the Complainants survey and the average score for each question: (1) "The service I received was very helpful" -2.0; (2) "The persons handling the case I was involved in were fair"- 2.2; (3) "The Commission provided service in a timely manner"- 2.3; (4) "I have filed a similar case with another office, i.e., EEOC, and the services you provided are better"- 0.8. The overall score for the Complainant survey was 1.8.

The survey questionnaire for the Respondents consist of six statements that indicate the extent to which the Respondents agree or disagree with statements regarding the service received during the investigation. The number (1) indicates strongly disagree; the number (2) indicates disagree; the number (3) indicates agree; the number (4) indicates strongly agree and the number (5) indicates don't know. The following presents the

questions in the Respondents survey and the average score for each question: (1) "The service I received was very helpful"- 3.4; (2) I was treated with courtesy and respect."- 3.5; (3) I have done business with this Commission before and the quality of service has improved"- 1.9; (4) "The persons handling the case I was involved in were fair"-3.5; (5) "The Commission provided service in a timely manner with minimum inconvenience to me". - 3.5; (6) "I have had similar dealings with other agencies such as this Commission and the services you provide are better." -3.7. The overall score for the Respondents survey was 3.25.

During the interviews with the Executive Assistant and the Division Directors, they indicated that some of the comments received from the Complainant and the Respondent were useful and some were actionable. The survey questionnaire is an unscientific survey which tends to provide more useful information rather than actionable information. Useful information is information and ideas that can be used to identify trends and suggest elements of the process, which may require scrutiny. Actionable information enables immediate action, helping to identify circumstances where something needs to and can be done now.

The survey questionnaire provides more useful information in that it helps identify possible patterns and trends Compliance-wide or affecting an individual. The trend can be within the investigative process or with a particular staff member. This can be useful. The survey questionnaire can give ideas of things to be aware of, such as, determining whether investigators have effectively explained the process and procedure

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of investigations to the parties. It also provides useful information, which may eventually lead to or develop actionable situations. The survey questionnaire is useful in that the Commission can identify problems with investigators who need customer service training. It provides a useful tool by letting the Commission know about investigators with consistently low scores (on the questionnaire) indicating the need for customer service training. The Commission has experienced a decline in the number of complaints regarding customer service since implementing the survey program.<sup>2</sup>

Actionable information identifies an opportunity for intervention. It needs to move on something more specific. As a result of the survey questionnaire, exit interviews with the Complainant and the Respondent were made mandatory for the investigator to conduct. The Compliance Programs Unit conducted an exit interview training session specifically to address this need. This was an immediate action. Prior to the survey questionnaire, data on complaints was captured as a result of comments received through written correspondence from parties or the result of telephone calls received from them. During that period, there was no formal effort to solicit information.

Based on the responses from the Complainant and the Respondent, these are some of the things that we thought were problems and these are things that need to be addressed:

### **COMPLAINANT RESPONSES**

1. Investigator contact witnesses and attempt contact more than once.
2. Keep the Complainant informed during the process of the investigation.
3. Timely handling of the investigation.
4. Some investigators are rude and curt.

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<sup>2</sup> Raymond Buxton, Herbert Lanford, Jr., Barbara Lisbon and Elizabeth Jenkins, personal communication, February 20, 2002

**COMPLAINANT RESPONSES CONT'D**

5. Investigator returns call to the Complainant and return the calls within a reasonable.
6. Investigator be more concerned and attentive toward the Complainant and listen to what the Complainant has to say.
7. Investigator meets with the Complainant in person to discuss the case.
8. Talk to Complainant prior to closing the case (discuss and explain to the Complainant the reason(s) for a no cause determination.
9. Investigator make regular contact with the Respondent, especially when requesting additional information.
10. Give the Complainant time to provide all of their information.
11. Conduct a more thorough investigation.
12. Do not give the option for the Complainant or the Respondent to refuse mediation.
13. Every case should be mediated.
14. Give the Complainant time to review mediation agreement papers before signing them.

**RESPONDENT RESPONSES**

1. Need to know efforts made for a resolution.
2. Commission streamline the amount of information requested initially
  - a. Respondent would prefer to respond to the allegation(s) with supporting documentation initially, then send additional documents as needed by the Commission to complete its investigation.
  - b. The Request for Information form seems to request unnecessary information in most cases.
3. Provide more information about the Charge of Discrimination complaint in the initial contact. This would reduce time spent gathering facts.
4. Mediation should be an option.
5. Explain services of the Commission to those who are not familiar with the Commission.
6. Return envelopes for Survey Questionnaire should be postage paid.
7. Improve efforts on the part of the Commission to resolve issues fairly for both parties.
8. Keep the Respondent informed and provide feedback during the process of the investigation.
9. Respondent be made aware of consequences, procedures, and suggestions on handling the employee during the proceedings.  
Assign multiple complaints to the same investigator.
10. Limit the access of the Complainant's attorney to information and documents submitted by the Respondent (until the Commission's disposition of charge).
11. Conduct on site visits to the Respondent's facility.
12. Monthly or quarterly updates on status of cases that extend beyond six months.
13. Give an explanation when sending correspondence indicating that the mediation process had failed especially when no attempt at mediation had been pursued.



**RESPONDENT RESPONSES CONT'D**

14. Investigator review the information that was sent to them before calling the Respondent.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The Executive Assistant and the three Division Directors regarding changing the survey questionnaire recommended several suggestions. Changing the name of the survey questionnaire from "performance survey" to "customer service survey", and having a new survey form developed by qualified professionals, and conducting the survey program in a scientific manner have been recommended. This survey will provide creditable and reliable information, which can be used, for specific decisions and actions.

Implementing the survey program would require funding to contract with OHR personnel for the development of the survey and with the University of South Carolina Center for Governance to plan a scientific survey program. Funding is not currently available, but once the state's economic situation improves, this scientific survey will be a worthwhile program to implement.

**SOUTH CAROLINA HUMAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION**  
**Performance Survey**

**Complaint Number:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Complainant Form)

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Thank you for helping us improve our services.

	<u>Strongly</u> <u>Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly</u> <u>Agree</u>	<u>Not</u> <u>Applicable</u>
1) The service I received was very helpful.	1	2	3	4	5
2) The persons handling the case I was involved in were fair	1	2	3	4	5
3) The Commission provided service in a timely manner.	1	2	3	4	5
4) I have filed a similar case with another office, i.e., EEOC, and the services you provide are better.	1	2	3	4	5

Comments regarding the above responses: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5) What, if any, extra efforts were made on your behalf? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6) What could have been done to make you feel more positive (other than outcome) about your experience here?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7) What suggestions would you offer for our improvement? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please write below any other comments or concerns you may have and would like to share.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**SOUTH CAROLINA HUMAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION**  
**Performance Survey**

**Complaint Number:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**(Respondent Form)**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Thank you for helping us improve our services.

	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Not Applicable</u>
1) The Commission allowed adequate time to respond.	1	2	3	4	5
2) Request for information was clear and definitive.	1	2	3	4	5
3) The work of the Commission was impartial in addressing the issues of both parties.	1	2	3	4	5
4) The Commission's investigator was courteous/professional when making contacts with your organization.	1	2	3	4	5
5) The Commission performed its work in a timely fashion	1	2	3	4	5
6) The Commission is regarded equal to or better than other similar agencies with addressing complainant issues.	1	2	3	4	5

Comments regarding the above responses: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7) What, if any, extra efforts were made by the investigator to satisfactorily resolve the complaint? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8) What could have been done to make you feel more positive (other than outcome) about your experience here?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please write below any other comments or concerns you may have and would like to share.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

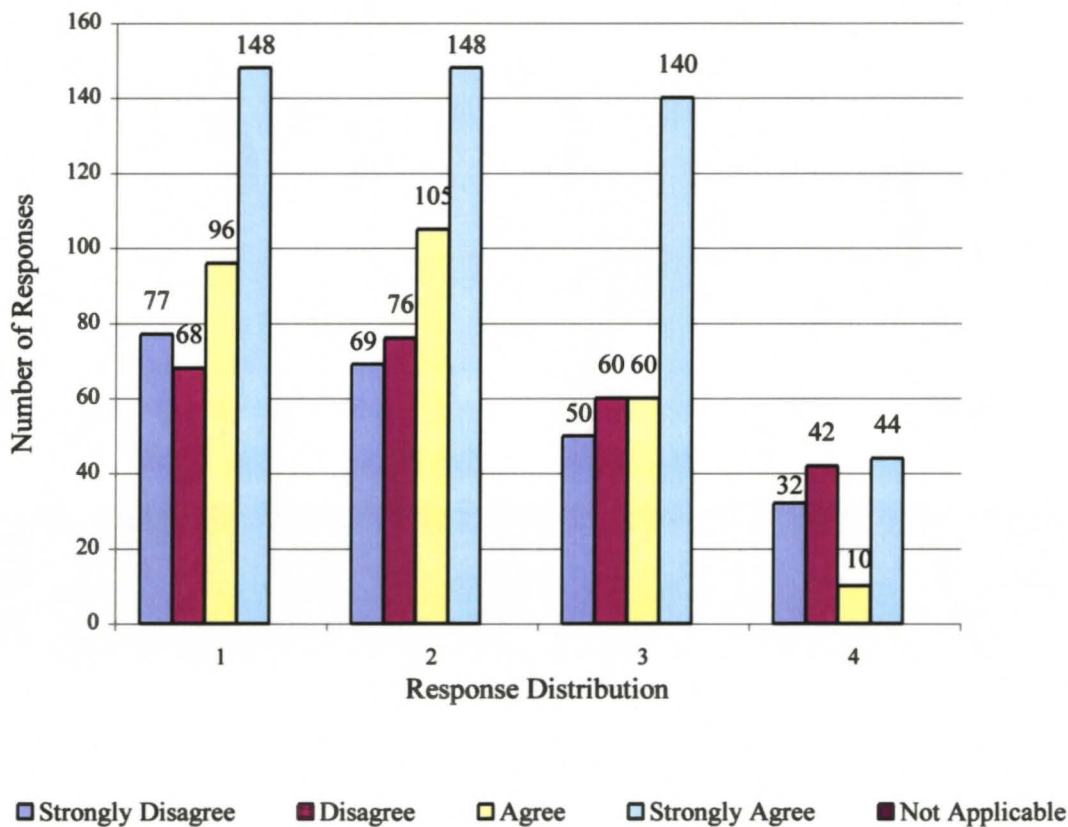
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### PERFORMANCE SURVEY (COMPLAINANT FORM)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
The service I received was very helpful	77	68	96	148	0
The persons handling the case I was involved in were fair	69	76	105	148	0
The Commission provided service in a timely manner	50	60	60	140	0
I have filed a similar case with another office, such as EEOC, and the services you provided are better	32	42	10	44	0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>0</b>

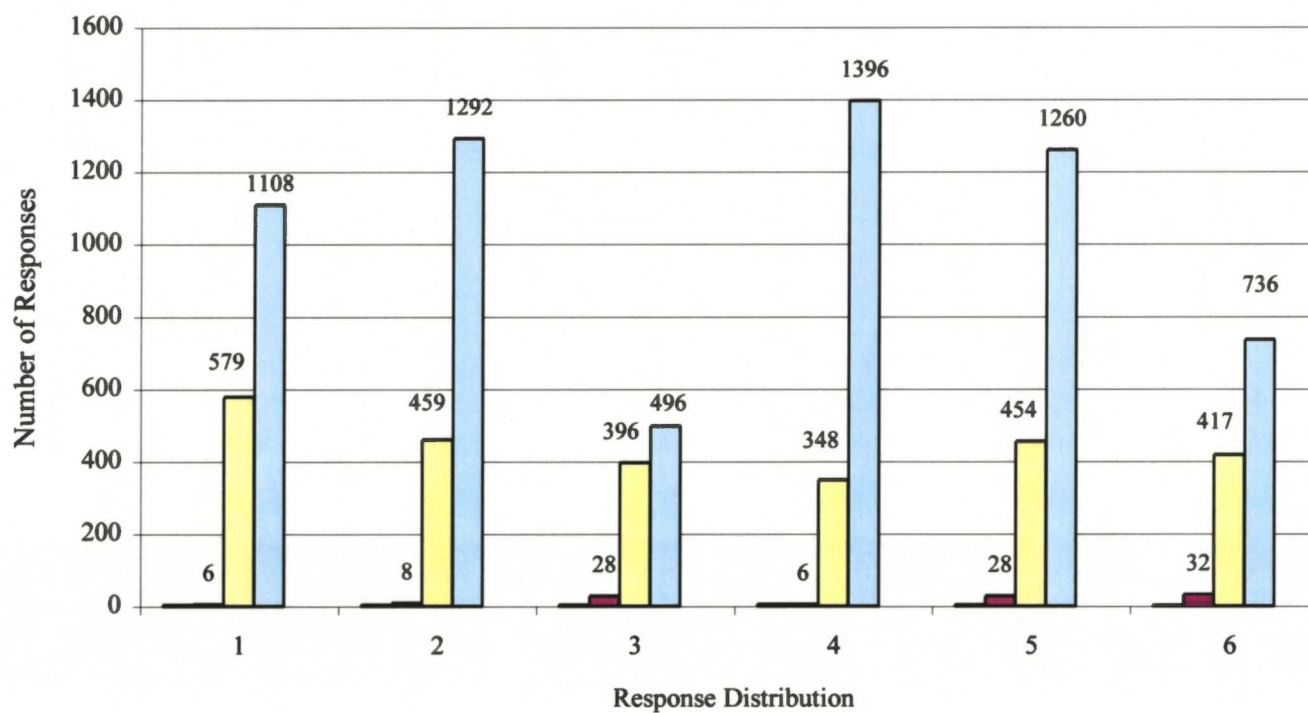
### Performance Survey (Complainant Form)



# PERFORMANCE SURVEY (RESPONDENT FORM)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
The service I received was very helpful.	4	6	579	1108	0
I was treated with courtesy and respect.	4	8	459	1292	0
I have done business with this Commission before and the quality of service has improved	3	28	396	496	0
The persons handling the case I was involved in were fair.	6	6	348	1396	0
The Commission provided service in a timely manner with minimum inconvenience to me.	4	28	454	1260	0
I have had similar dealings with other agencies such as this Commission and the services you provide are better.	2	32	417	736	0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>2653</b>	<b>6288</b>	<b>0</b>

## Performance Survey (Respondent Form)



## REFERENCES

Raymond Buxton, Herbert Lanford, Jr., Barbara Lisbon and Elizabeth Jenkins, personal communication, February 20, 2002

South Carolina Human Affairs Commission, Complainant and Respondent Survey Forms

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